

# Legislative Assembly of Alberta



CANADIANA

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Fact Sheet No. 10

## The Legislature Building

On March 15, 1906, Alberta's first Legislature opened its first session. They did not meet at the Legislature Building, though, because it did not yet exist. Instead, the opening ceremonies were held at Edmonton's Thistle Curling Rink just north of Jasper Avenue, after which the Assembly moved to nearby McKay Avenue school.

In these modest surroundings they dealt with the first item of business for the new province: deciding on a capital city. Edmonton, Calgary, Red Deer, and Banff were all competing for the distinction. Edmonton was not only the centre of Alberta's newly booming agricultural sector; it was also a Liberal stronghold, and with these two factors in its favour, it won the honour.

Choosing a site for the building was easy. The high-cliffed bank of the North Saskatchewan River was both physically commanding and historically significant. Here was the site of Fort Edmonton, a major fur trading post of the Hudson's Bay Company, around which the settlement of Edmonton had developed.

### Beaux Arts Style

Alberta's Legislature Building was designed by the provincial architect, Allan Merrick Jeffers. He was a graduate of the Rhode Island School of Design in the United States, and he was probably influenced by the state capitol building there, which was in the popular Beaux Arts style. This style is evident in the design of our Legislature Building: the T-shaped floor plan; the building's entrance, or portico, supported by massive columns; the dome rising above a spacious rotunda.

Materials suitable for the building's lofty design had to be imported. Workers used granite brought in from Vancouver Island to finish the exterior of the first storey, and Paskapoo sandstone from the Glenbow quarry near Calgary for the remaining four storeys. The interior of the building features three kinds of marble. Green marble from Pennsylvania was used in the columns and the rotunda walls, light gray marble quarried in Quebec for the floors and staircase, and dark gray marble from Italy for the base of the walls and columns. All together, 1,755 tonnes (1,934 tons) of marble were imported for the building's interior.

Construction began in 1907, and in September of 1912 the Duke of Connaught, Canada's Governor General, declared the Legislature Building officially open. Its grandeur was obvious from the moment the front doors first opened. The main entrance leads directly into the rotunda, which is encircled by marble columns. Its walls rise uninterrupted from the main floor to the vaulted dome, a distance of 55 metres (180 feet). The rotunda connects the east and west wings of the main floor to the great marble staircase that leads to the Assembly Chamber. The Chamber has its own dome and is lit by stained glass skylights and hundreds of light bulbs.

The Legislature Building has undergone many changes since its 1912 opening. Richard Blakey, provincial architect until 1923, added the dome-within-a-dome that you see when you look up from the rotunda. In 1932 palm seeds, a gift from the state of California, were planted in pots in the gallery ringing the interior dome; these are now five large trees peering down at the rotunda's fountain. The fountain itself has



come and gone more than once: the first fountain was constructed in 1939 and removed shortly thereafter while the present one was built in 1959. The mahogany panels that grace the walls of the Chamber were added in 1987, as was an elegant pale green carpet, new gallery seating, and microphones built into the members' desks.

Alberta's Legislature Building is lavishly decorated with images of our history and political traditions. Inside the rotunda are two bronze statues, one of Princess Louise Caroline Alberta, after whom both the province and Lake Louise are named, and one of Chief Crowfoot, a Blackfoot Indian leader whose policy of co-operation led to the peaceful settlement of Alberta. Portraits of Premiers and Lieutenant Governors adorn the walls of the third floor, and you can view Alberta's Speakers one floor above. The building also has its share of decorative hardwood carvings, including coats of arms above the main entrance to the Chamber, above the Speaker's Chair, and in the Carillon Room on the fifth floor.

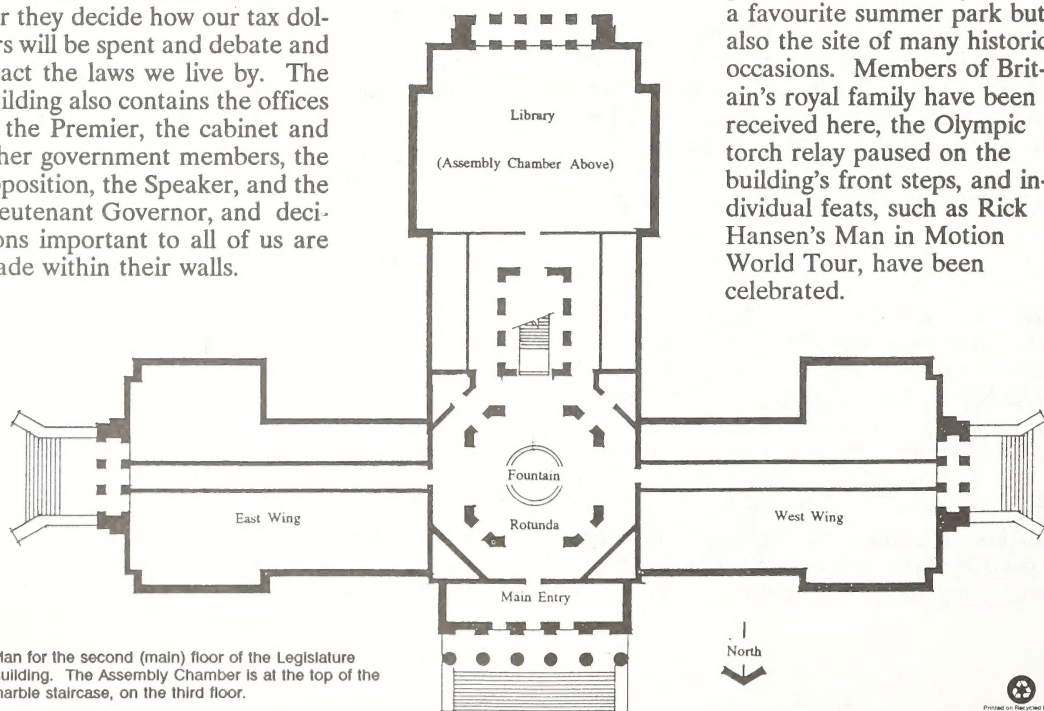
### A Place for People

The Legislature Building belongs to all Albertans. It is here that the members elected by the people carry out the people's business. Within the Chamber they decide how our tax dollars will be spent and debate and enact the laws we live by. The building also contains the offices of the Premier, the cabinet and other government members, the opposition, the Speaker, and the Lieutenant Governor, and decisions important to all of us are made within their walls.

Although the Legislature Building has always belonged to the people of Alberta, most Albertans seemed to find its design and purpose too intimidating for casual visits. But the economic boom of the '70s meant that there was finally enough money to transform the grounds of the Legislature from a snarl of old buildings and traffic to a park fit for the majestic building. In the process, the Legislature Building became not only a more welcome place for visitors but also *the* place for public ceremonies. The old houses were bulldozed and the traffic and parking moved underground; in their place is a vast green landscape surrounding the building, with fountains, walkways, and a reflecting pool.

Providing added charm is the clear, bell-like sound of carillon music that you sometimes hear outside the Legislature Building. The carillon, located on the fifth floor, was installed in 1967 to commemorate Canada's Centennial. A carillon works much like a piano: the keys of a keyboard are played, causing metal hammers to strike finely tuned bells. The Legislature carillon has 391 such bells. The music is amplified electronically and is especially invigorating on a crisp winter's day.

Completed in 1983, the grounds have not only become a favourite summer park but also the site of many historic occasions. Members of Britain's royal family have been received here, the Olympic torch relay paused on the building's front steps, and individual feats, such as Rick Hansen's Man in Motion World Tour, have been celebrated.



Plan for the second (main) floor of the Legislature Building. The Assembly Chamber is at the top of the marble staircase, on the third floor.